

Prose Editing “Hacks”

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First:

- What’s the hook, or main idea, of your story or essay? Can you say it in one sentence? For an essay, what is the one thing you want the reader to know or understand by the end? For fiction: what do you want the reader to feel at the end?
- Who is your audience? If you’re writing an essay, what do you think the reader already knows about this subject?
- Does your piece have a beginning, middle, and end? Does everything on the page push toward that ending?
- Are you starting your essay or story in the right place? Take us right into the scene, avoiding too much backstory or explanation.
- Is there a turning point in the piece? In fiction: where does the protagonist change or learn something? In an essay: where do **you** change or learn something?

Now:

- Read it out loud to yourself!
- Read it out loud to someone else!
- Have someone else read it out loud to you!

Notice:

- Where you or your reader trip over the words. Is there a reason? Does anything feel off, awkward, or unnatural?

- Extra words you don't need, especially in a very short piece! What small, unnecessary words can you cut to tighten the piece and improve its flow? (Use the search feature for words like *just, really, so, maybe*, etc.)
- When you read your piece out loud, underline or highlight anything that sounds *fancy*, **like you're trying to impress someone**, or *that doesn't sound the way you usually speak when you're talking to a friend*. (This will not apply to all writing, but often our best prose flows easily and naturally!)
- When someone reads it out loud to you, do the same!

Now:

- Go through and underline every adjective (word that describes a noun) and circle every adverb (word that describes a verb).
- Delete every adverb unless you love it more than life itself!
- Delete at least half of your adjectives. Why are you using them? Are they helping you avoid something that makes you uncomfortable? Are you explaining and describing instead of immersing yourself in the event(s)?

*Note: rules are made to be broken! You can use adverbs, of course! But we often overuse descriptive language instead of focusing on the action on the page! We can learn so much about a person or character by what they do and say, rather than explaining who they are and what they mean.

Now:

- Use the "read aloud" feature to have your computer read your piece to you!

(Please don't post or share this handout!)